

# THE EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT

**Supplement to *Zambezia*, 1986**  
**The Journal of the University of Zimbabwe**

This is the fifth Education Supplement to *Zambezia*.

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Publications Office  
P. O. Box MP 45  
Mount Pleasant  
Harare, Zimbabwe

Phototypeset at the University of Zimbabwe  
Printed by NCR City Printers, Harare

**ZAMBEZIA**  
**THE EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT, 1986**

**CONTENTS**

Introduction .....		v
Towards a Curriculum Analysis Model for National Development .....	<i>O. E. Maravanyika</i>	1
Ethics in Administration .....	<i>C. E. M. Chikombah</i>	29
Booker T. Washington's Philosophy of the 'Grand Trinity' in Education .....	<i>B. J. Siyakwazi</i>	39
Traditional African Stories as Learning Materials .....	<i>N. D. Atkinson</i>	51
BOOK REVIEWS .....		63

## ETHICS IN ADMINISTRATION

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THE SUBJECT OF ethics and morals and their application to educational administration is a relatively recent phenomenon. Ethics and morals had been left to the philosophers, but now issues and problems are being raised in educational administration that require the attention of the moral philosopher. Professional groups, including educational administrators in other countries, are now endeavouring to produce ethical codes and guidelines for future behaviour. But in Zimbabwe, this responsibility seems to have been left with the government. Ethical and moral values are so important that they must be set down to provide guidelines.

Whether this is carried out by the relevant professional association, as in medicine and law, or by government legislation, as was done in Alberta, Canada, in 1977, and in Zimbabwe through the Unified Teaching Service, is immaterial at this stage, but the result will be very much the same. Professional bodies and groups of all types are now highly conscious of the need to produce an ethical and moral code for the assistance of members in maintaining a high level of integrity, and in protecting themselves.

The main purpose of this article is to bring together some of the current views on ethical behaviour and to focus on the actions of the educational administrator to see whether his conduct can be classified as ethically right and ethically good. Some examples will be given of unethical practices that are taking place in schools today.

### ETHICAL CODES FOR THE ADMINISTRATOR

Guidelines have been produced by the Consultative Group on Ethics of the Canada Council for all those who are engaged in social science enquiry.<sup>1</sup> By implication, these guidelines could be extended to researchers and practitioners in educational administration. In brief, the report has set out general ethical principles or guidelines which should be followed by researchers and social scientists. The main areas of concern were as follows: that participants in any social science enquiry should be kept informed of what was happening to them; that the process should be entirely voluntary and no deception of any kind should

<sup>1</sup> The Canada Council, Consultative Group on Ethics, *Report of the Consultative Group on Ethics* (Ottawa, The Council, 1977).

be practised; and that there should be an element of trust, doubts could be expressed and the results of any social science experimentation should be freely available. The researcher should also take into consideration the notion of acceptable risk/benefit to those involved, the right to privacy of those individuals concerned and also the right to confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

This upsurge of interest in ethical codes is reflected in other professional groups who have decided that they should provide a code of ethics for their members. Questions that immediately come to mind in suggesting a formula for a code of ethics take the following form: Where does one differentiate between issues which are legal, religious, political and, finally, ethical? How does the professional person draw up guidelines concerning modes of conduct within a profession which are essentially ethical in character?

Southard, writing on ethics for executives, asks the question, Can we be ethical in today's world?<sup>2</sup> There was, a few years ago, considerable discussion on ethical behaviour — or, more correctly, unethical behaviour — in the Hollywood movie industry. Commentators were conscious of the lack of an ethical approach in connection with the presentation of the Oscar awards, and with financial pay-offs that had been made. The commentators were equating an ethical approach with a high degree of personal integrity — integrity being understood to mean honesty and uprightness in all business dealings. Southard writes that personal integrity is more crucial for the decision-maker than for the person who carries out the decisions. This point of view is certainly appropriate for the educational administrator.

Baumhart wrote that four out of five businessmen affirmed the presence of practices which are generally accepted but are unethical, for example, the taking of bribes and distorting of facts.<sup>3</sup> He described the business world as a place where moral problems and personal integrity are key issues. Only in medicine and law can an executive have a chance for inner direction. Baumhart is saying that legal and medical practitioners can live by the moral sense which has been implanted in them by their elders and which can direct their work towards determined goals. He describes the double standards which are prevalent in the business world today and says that behaviour in matters of morals and ethics goes back to a personal situation; there are some principles which can guide us under any circumstances.

Once again the implications for the educational administrator are apparent, but it does seem as if there is a need for these issues to be articulated clearly in terms that the educational administrator would understand and appreciate. In the

<sup>2</sup> S. Southard, *Ethics for Executives* (New York, Nelson, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> R. C. Baumhart, 'How ethical are businessmen?', *Harvard Business Review* (1961), XXXIX, iv, 6-8, 10, 12, 16, 19, 156, 158, 160, 163-4, 166, 168, 170-2, 174, 176.

case of the administrator, ethical dilemmas present themselves from time to time. Sometimes these dilemmas are insoluble, but on occasions the educational administrator is faced with situations which could be resolved if there were some ethical guidelines to assist him.

### *Ethical dilemmas and the educational administrator*

Ethical dilemmas which confront educational administrators may include the following:

- 1) What action should the school administrator take when he has to make a choice between two opposite courses of action? The content of History texts has a close relationship with this statement, particularly in such controversial issues as the inclusion of the *chimurenga* heroes as suggested by the Minister of Information, Dr Shamuyarira.<sup>4</sup>
- 2) What action should the school administrator take when children are being manipulated in various educational testing situations? Utilizing children in an attempt to change society is also highly unethical.
- 3) Should the school administrator advocate programmes which are essentially elitist in nature, or are highly egalitarian?
- 4) Finally, the issue of the grading of students needs to be considered. Are the students being graded in a manner that is both proper and professional?

Purcell has written that the acceptance of an ethical code means that members of a professional group have accepted the principle of a voluntary assumption of self-discipline above and beyond the requirements of law.<sup>5</sup> However, the fact that ethical codes do exist does not always mean that their statements will be acted upon. Sometimes an ethical code will have very little impact on its members, particularly if the component parts of the ethical code are unconvincing.

### *Codes for school administrators*

The *Code of Ethics* of the American Association of School Administrators contains policies which 'are designed to inspire a quality of behavior which reflects honor and dignity on the profession of school administration'.<sup>6</sup> Yet some of the statements that are set down lack the impact of the ethical codes of behaviour of the medical and legal professions.

## ETHICS AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

What is unethical in educational administration is not nearly as clear-cut as in the

<sup>4</sup> See *The Sunday Mail*, 22 June 1980.

<sup>5</sup> T. Purcell, 'Ethical codes', *Management Review* (May 1976), LXV, 12-15.

<sup>6</sup> American Association of School Administrators, *Code of Ethics*, Preamble, reproduced in First Rochester Seminar for Chief School Officers on Ethics and the Superintendency (Rochester NY, 1968), *Ethics and the School Administrator*, ed. by G. L. Immegart and J. M. Burroughs (Danville IL, Interstate, 1970), 113.

professions of law and medicine. Clearly in these two professions, examples of unethical behaviour are apparent to observers. It is possible to make a judgement with some degree of accuracy and state that certain members of a profession are acting in an unethical way.

In education this is not so easy, mainly because in the education profession the boundary-lines between ethical and unethical practices are not as clearly marked as in law and medicine. Medicine and law have acquired a certain ethos about them over the centuries, and a veneration of some of their beliefs and practices, and of the profession itself, has grown up. The boundary-lines between ethical and unethical practices are clearly marked for the legal and the medical practitioner. In education this is not the case; it is more difficult for a layperson to detect instances of unethical behaviour in a school setting than for him to be aware of medical and legal unethical situations.

### *Ethical guidelines for the administrator*

How then is the educational administrator to know if he has acted within an ethical framework? Who is to tell him that his behaviour is verging on the unethical? Ethical and moral guidelines can be provided by a number of sources as now indicated. In general terms, the administrator's colleagues would give him a reasonable idea of what they thought was ethical behaviour in a particular situation. The climate of the organization would also indicate broad guidelines on how to act in given situations. The behaviour pattern of the superordinate would give a reasonable notion of what were acceptable limits of behaviour.

More specifically, McFarland has identified sources of standards of ethical behaviour which impinge on the administrator.<sup>7</sup> The major influences are:

- 1) The views of the larger community or society;
- 2) the administrator's own personal standards which he brings to an organization;
- 3) the values and goals that are part of the system;
- 4) the value-forming activities;
- 5) the work careers and occupations;
- 6) the degree of professionalization present; and
- 7) the codes of the various associations to which the administrator belongs.

All these areas are utilized to provide an ethical code for an administrator.

### DIFFERING VIEWS OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR

The ethical standards of professional practice have been identified by McFarland who states that integrity, high moral purpose, professional fidelity, acting in a

<sup>7</sup> D. E. McFarland, *Management Principles and Practices* (New York, Macmillan, 4th edn, 1974), 611.

professional and proper way, upholding the honour and maintaining the dignity of the particular profession are the main requirements of an ethical approach.<sup>8</sup>

### *The ethical screen*

Immegart and Burroughs have prepared what they call an ethical screen (see Figure 1).<sup>9</sup> This involves a systems approach to explain the nature of educational administrators' ethical decision-making. The educational administrator who is faced with making an ethical decision has five areas from which he may choose. These areas include societal, personal, professional, organizational and means ethics. The educational administrator may choose to use only one or a combination of two or more to reach his solution.

Societal ethics are those normative obligations to which all members of a society are responsible. These are broadly-based and are generally the accepted written or unwritten ethics in society. Personal ethics are the result of experiences and expectations that the individual feels he must uphold. This is probably the most difficult area for administrators as personal ethics may often conflict with other areas of the screen. Professional ethics are much easier to identify than are ethics in the other areas. Codes of ethics aid the educational administrator in some areas of decision-making. Organizational ethics is an area with which some professionals do not have to contend, particularly medical and legal practitioners. The means ethic is often more behavioural and pragmatic than normative in nature. Sometimes ethical problems evolve when using the screen: for example, which ethical areas should one use when attempting to solve an ethical problem?

Kohlberg says that there must be no exceptions to principles in moral questions, and that the major concepts which need to be considered are justice, equality and rights rather than responsibility and obligation.<sup>10</sup> He stresses universal ethical principles, universal principles of justice, with equality of human rights and respect for the dignity of human beings as the main guidelines. The implications for the educational administrator are clearly defined in Kohlberg's statements. The administrator should act justly with respect for persons and should treat each person as an end, rather than a means. Kohlberg believes that justice is not a set of rules, but that it is a moral principle. By moral principle we mean a mode of choosing which is universal, a rule of choosing which we want all people to adopt in all situations. Hence it is difficult to distinguish between ethical behaviour and acting according to the moral principles that Kohlberg describes.

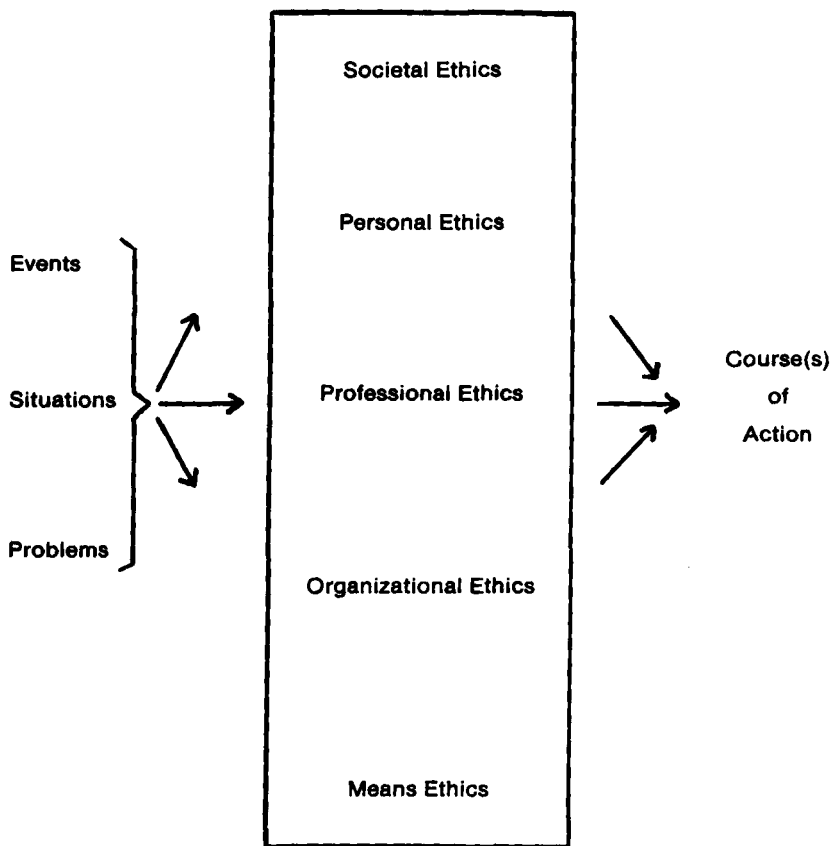
<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 618.

<sup>9</sup> G. L. Immegart and J. M. Burroughs, 'Ethics and educational administration: Dilemmas and implications', in First Rochester Seminar . . . , *Ethics and the School Administrator*, 94-5.

<sup>10</sup> See L. Kohlberg, *Collected Papers on Moral Development and Moral Education* (n.p., 1973).



**Figure 1: THE EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR'S ETHICAL SCREEN**



INPUT → ETHICAL FRAMEWORK (STRUCTURE) → OUTPUT

*Source:* Immegart and Burroughs, 'Ethics and educational administration', 95.

Peters lists three guiding principles for ethical problems in educational matters.<sup>11</sup> First, the educational process must entail the transmission of that which is worthwhile. Next, the cognitive aspects of the educational process must be emphasized. Finally, the educational processes must be ones of which the learner is mindful or aware. If all these criteria are met, then, in Peters's views, an ethical approach is being taken towards educational matters.

### *Ethical behaviour and the educational administrator*

How does all this relate to the world of the practising educational administrator? In the course of his day-to-day activities the educational administrator is called upon to make numerous moral judgements. Moral judgement is the opinion that something is either 'right' or 'wrong'. Ideally, moral judgements should be made in the light of full knowledge and appreciation of all the relevant facts, and they must be made in the light of the facts that the administrator can reasonably be expected to have in his possession when he makes such a judgement. In making moral judgements, then, the educational administrator should attempt to make judgements which are: (a) impartial in the light of all facts; (b) sympathetic to those most concerned; and (c) are judgements which demonstrate imagination.

## UNETHICAL BEHAVIOUR IN EDUCATION

The difficulty for the educational administrator is in the application of all these principles to particular situations. How should the educational administrator react when he is confronted with unethical behaviour? Case studies can provide numerous examples of medical and legal practitioners who have acted in unethical ways, but the literature regarding ethical problems and educational administrators is somewhat scant.

### *Unethical behaviour in schools*

Some of the recent examples of unethical behaviour that have been documented are included below:<sup>12</sup>

- 1) Nisbet, analysing the ethics of teaching, says that it is value-laden moral enterprise *par excellence*. Nisbet states here that the teacher is unethical if he behaves like a tyrant in the class or criticizes inadequate answers in a cruel manner. The teacher is also unethical if he demands adherence to a party line or encourages destructive competition within the class. These may be examples of unethical behaviour in education, but in comparison to unethical legal and medical examples, they do seem somewhat unconvincing in the world of professional reality.

<sup>11</sup> R. S. Peters, *Ethics and Education* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1966).

<sup>12</sup> See S. Hook, P. Kurtz and M. Todorovich (ed.), *The Ethics of Teaching and Scientific Research* (Buffalo, Prometheus, 1977).

- 2) Another example of unethical behaviour is that of the principal who misuses the power accorded to him and is guilty of misfeasance. Perhaps he may manipulate people on the staff for his own ends, or, in reporting on his staff, use innuendo or terse comments to make certain implications. Evaluating staff members after only a cursory inspection is also considered unethical by some. Discussing the professional weaknesses of a teacher with another is also unethical.
- 3) Conflict of interest may be regarded as unethical, particularly when the other interest has a detrimental effect on the teacher's professional performance in the classroom. The teacher who is 'moonlighting' and who prefers his outside job and the extra income is also behaving unethically.
- 4) Distortion of facts, the withholding of facts, falsification of the records for his own ends, are also examples of unethical behaviour of which the principal may be guilty. Facts may be withheld or distorted so that the principal or department head appears in a more favourable light at a time suitable to him.
- 5) Adopting double standards, committing improper actions by doing such things as stealing ideas from colleagues or padding the expense accounts. The double standard occurs when the principal advises staff on one course of action but does the opposite himself.
- 6) Showing political bias in the classroom, by adopting a partisan/racial approach to controversial issues.
- 7) Being guilty of academic neglect in the classroom, by appearing poorly-prepared and taking insufficient interest in courses for which the teacher is responsible.
- 8) Demonstrating prejudices to children and failing to meet obligations of being value-neutral to children are also considered to be aspects of unethical behaviour.
- 9) Taking part in and assisting in the constant testing of children, whether psychological, sociological or educational. The use of children in experiments for satisfying the teacher's special interests, as opposed to regular classroom instruction, is considered unethical.
- 10) Teachers have access to information about children and their families, and this personal information should be respected. Any breach of privacy regarding the child's family is considered unethical.

This list could be extended, but, again, unethical practices in educational administration do not seem to be of the same magnitude as the legal and medical examples mentioned earlier. The school administrator who withholds certain information from his school board, cannot be placed in the same category as the solicitor who absconds with the clients' trust account or the doctor who is guilty of unprofessional conduct with one of his patients.

### ETHICAL CODES TO GUIDE BEHAVIOUR

One answer to these issues which involves ethics and morals would seem to be in

the formation of carefully controlled ethical codes. However, ethical codes often have little impact on members of particular professional associations. Sanctions cannot readily be imposed beyond a desire for professional esteem and prestige within the profession, the use of taboos and a certain amount of unpleasant publicity. What is needed to ensure ethical and moral behaviour in educational administration seems to be careful, thoughtful, human, and humane judgement in all matters.

One way of ensuring this behaviour is to encourage the formation of associations or institutions of people whose views represent the moral concerns of society as a whole. Community leaders, members of the legal profession, the clergy, politicians and the educational administrators should combine to produce acceptable moral and ethical guidelines based on accepted standards. Or the teaching profession itself should produce a code of ethics that guides both teachers and educational administrators. It should not wait for government guidance.

### *Legislation and ethical codes*

If these guidelines are not produced, one alternative will be for government to bring in legislation to cover all occupations through a code covering such aspects as integrity and impartiality, and standards that employees will be expected to live up to. In addition, the code should cover such areas as outside employment, investment and management of private assets, political activity, public statements, acceptance of gifts, dealings with relatives, penalties, and a review of any decision. However, the weakness here is that codes of ethics imposed by governments get very little respect from the professionals.

The introduction to the proposal refers to the special obligation which makes public-service employment unlike that with a private employer and which demands that there be, or seem to be, no conflict between the private interests of employees and their responsibility to the public. However, although the code is called a Code of Conduct and Ethics, it does seem to refer specifically to the business interests and private assets of members of the public service.

In Zimbabwe, the Government, through the Unified African Teaching Service (UATS) Regulations, controls the actions of teachers and educational administrators. Chapter 97 of the UATS regulations 1975 (Part VII, Sections 70–81) acts like a code of ethics for the teaching profession. The Zimbabwean code of ethics for teachers covers the following:

- (a) Acts of misconduct.
- (b) Action taken against a teacher.
- (c) Procedure taken.

This code is concerned with obvious/open unethical behaviour, but not with the hidden behaviour of the teacher or anyone else connected with education. However, it is better to have a poorly-drawn code of ethics than to have no code at all.

## CONCLUSION

Although legislation by government in ethical and moral problems may seem repugnant to many, it may in fact be necessary — particularly if the teaching profession itself is incapable of producing a code. Ethical standards are subject to changing societal values as well as to subjective interpretations. The ethical concepts of honesty, integrity, self-discipline, loyalty and compassion are universally acclaimed, but adherence to these standards varies greatly among people. Increasing materialism, as well as a generally decreasing commitment to moral or traditional religious values, may require the educational administrator to turn to legislation if he wishes to carry out his responsibilities in a more ethical and moral way.

The main requirement for ethical behaviour of an administrator was that he should demonstrate the quality of integrity on all occasions. Ethical codes have been laid down by some professional groups and associations, but these do not always seem to be successful in maintaining high standard. Some examples were given of unethical practices in educational situations, but it was emphasized that these breaches of conduct do not create such interest as they would do in the medical or legal professions, particularly those imposed on the teaching profession by government. Education generally is not regarded in the same way as the professions of law and medicine. Education lacks the intangible mystique that is attributed to the practice of law and medicine, hence, when a teacher or headmaster is guilty of some breach of the educational ethical code, public reaction is minimal or sometimes even non-existent. Some examples of unethical behaviour were given. The most serious examples are the tyrannical teacher, the headmaster who withholds information to further his own interests, and the teacher who neglects to carry out his professional responsibilities.

Finally, the comment was made that if professional groups are unable to become self-regulatory, then government may be forced to bring in legislation such as that introduced in the Alberta Legislature and by the Rhodesian Government. Such legislation may ensure at least some compliance with an ethical code to direct the behaviour of both professionals and administrators.



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